

## ASHANTI REGION

Ashanti is an administrative region in Ghana centrally located in the middle belt of Ghana. It lies between longitudes 0.15W and 2.25W, and latitudes 5.50N and 7.46N. The region shares boundaries with four of the ten political regions, Brong-Ahafo in the north, Eastern region in the east, Central region in the south and Western region in the South west. Most of the region's inhabitants are Ashanti people, one of Ghana's major ethnic groups. Most of Ghana's cocoa is grown in Ashanti, and it is also a major site of Ghana's gold-mining industry.

### Brief history

The Asante (Ashantis) constitute the largest of the various subgroups of the Akan, who trace their origins partly to Bono-Manso and Techiman, in present-day Brong Ahafo Region. They constitute 14.8 per cent of all Ghanaians by birth, and 30.1 per cent of the total Akan population of 8,562,748 in the country. Various oral traditions have it that the Ashantis migrated from various places through Bono-Manso/Takyiman (Techiman) to present day Ashanti Region.

As a united people, they started with a nucleus of the Oyoko clan around Asantemanso. After several years of subjugation by other empires, such as the Akwamu and the Denkyira, Asante eventually grew to be a very powerful empire founded by King Osei-Tutu I (1695-1717), after defeating the Denkyira King Ntim Gyakari during the battle of Feyiase (Buah, 1998).

Ironically, King Osei Tutu I had spent his childhood days in the court of the Denkyira King, according to custom, and had escaped from there to Akwamu where he met his lifelong friend and spiritual mentor, the legendary Okomfo Anokye. It is believed that it was through Okomfo Anokye's extraordinary supernatural powers that King Osei Tutu founded the Ashanti Empire; as he is said to have commanded the Golden Stool to fall from "the heavens", the stool which, to this day, serves as the symbol of the spirit, unity and strength of the Ashantis.

At the height of its glory, the influence and culture of the Asante Kingdom stretched beyond the borders of the present day Ghana. The Ashanti were able to preserve what was best in Akan culture, including the use of gold dust as currency and gold weights as a measure, which system was actually originated by the great Bono (Brong) King Akumfi Ameyaw I (1328-1363) (Buah, 1998).

The Asante fought many successful wars against the Denkyira and their allies including the Wassa, the British, the Fante, and even the Bonos (Brongs). Indeed it was the Ashanti King Opoku Ware I who defeated the Bonos in 1723 and destroyed Bono-Manso, forcing the Bono Empire to move its capital from Manso to present day Techiman. The Ashanti Empire eventually collapsed with the defeat and exile of King Prempeh I, first to El-Mina Castle and eventually to the Seychelles.

Not even the last stalwart stand by the great warrior Queen Yaa Asantewaa could revive the fame, fortune and power of Ashanti. However, the culture, kinship and social structure of Ashanti, like many of the other Akan groups, has been preserved and maintained to the present day, and underlines the cultural heritage, not only of the Asante, but of the entire Akan ethnic group. The present Asanti King (Asantehene) Osei Tutu II, is a direct matrilineal descendant of Osei Tutu I.

### Demographic characteristics

The population of the region is concentrated in a few districts. The Kumasi metropolis alone accounts for nearly one-third of the region's population. Slightly over half, 51.5 per cent, of the population of the region is in four districts. While more than half of the population in the region resides in urban areas, in 15 of the 18 districts, over half the population live in rural areas. The high level of urbanisation in the region is due mainly to the high concentration of the population in the Kumasi metropolis (which has almost about a third of the region's population).

Males outnumber females in eleven districts. The age structure of the population in the districts is skewed towards the youth. The dependent population in the districts is high, ranging from 42.2 per cent in the Kumasi metropolis to 57.3 per cent in the Ahafo Ano South District. Total Fertility Rates (TFRs) are high in most of the districts, except in the following four: Adansi West, Asante Akim South, Kumasi metropolis and Afigya Sekyere, where TFRs are lower than the regional average of 4.7. The TFR in the Ahafo Ano South District (9.4) is particularly high.

### Social characteristics

All the districts in the region have more than a quarter of households headed by females with the lowest (26.9%) in Ejura Sekyedumase and the highest (40.1%) in the Ejisu-Juaben, Districts. Children constitute the greater proportion of household members in most of the districts, except in three: Kwabre, Sekyere East, and Ahafo Ano South, where "other relatives" outnumber children. In each district, children and other relatives account for more than 50.0 per cent of household members.

Information on the levels of educational attainment and literacy show that between 40.0 and 50.0 per cent of the population in the districts, particularly, females either have no formal education or have only pre-school education. The proportions of the population with basic education vary from 67.7 per cent in the Kumasi metropolis to 86.9 per cent in the Amansie West District. Between 51.3 per cent (Kumasi metropolis) and 73.0 per cent (Amansie West) of the population currently in school are in the primary school.

The proportions in JSS are low, ranging from 16.1 per cent to 22.4 percent, tapering down further to lower proportions at higher levels of education. Illiteracy levels are high in the districts and higher for females than the males; the level is also higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Illiteracy rates vary from 26.0 per cent in Kumasi metropolis to 64.7 per cent in the Ejura Sekyedumase District. Only three Districts, Kumasi metropolis, Adansi West and Ejisu-Juaben, have illiteracy levels lower than the regional average of 40.4 percent.

### Economic Characteristics

The proportion of the economically active population varies from 71.4 in the Kumasi metropolis to 85.2 per cent in the Amansie West District. Only five districts have proportions lower than 80.0 percent. The major occupation in all the districts is Agriculture/Animal Husbandry/Forestry, except in the Kumasi metropolis, where Sales workers predominate. The proportion of females in Sales is higher than that of males in all the districts.

The proportion of females in Agriculture/Animal Husbandry/Forestry is also higher than that of males for the region as a whole and for the following three districts: Kumasi, Ejura Sekyedumase, and Offinso. Residents in the rural areas are mostly in Agriculture whereas those in urban areas are mainly in Sales and Production work. Majority of the economically active population are self-employed, mainly in the private informal sector, which provides job opportunities, particularly for females with little or no formal education.

### Community Facilities

Apart from traditional healers, community facilities such as schools, hospitals/clinics and telephones, all of which contribute to the improvement in the living conditions of people, are scarcely found in all the districts, except the Kumasi metropolis. In most of the localities in the districts, the nearest facility is located more than 10 kilometres away. Traditional healing is the only facility that is mostly found in the localities or within a short distance.

Location

### Physical features

Due to human activities and bushfires, the forest vegetation of parts of the region, particularly the north-eastern part, has been reduced to savanna. The region has an average annual rainfall of 1270mm and two rainy seasons. The major rainy season starts in March, with a major pick in May. There is a slight dip in July and a pick in August, tapering off in November. December to February is dry, hot, and dusty.

The average daily temperature is about 27 degrees Celsius. Much of the region is situated between 150 and 300 metres above sea level. The region is endowed with a spectacular geography-lakes, scarps, forest reserves, waterfalls, national parks, birds and wildlife sanctuaries. Notable among them are the Owabi Arboretum and Bomgobiri wildlife sanctuaries. The region is drained by Lake

Bosomtwe, the largest natural lake in the country, and Rivers Offin, Prah, Afram and Owabi. There are other smaller rivers and streams which serve as sources of drinking water for residents of some localities in the region.

#### Political administration

There are 18 administrative districts in the Ashanti Region including the Kumasi metropolis. The region also has 33 constituencies and 840 electoral areas, the highest in the country. A Member of Parliament represents each of the 33 constituencies at the nation's 200-member legislature.

The Regional Minister is the political Head of the region, and the Chairman of the Regional Co-ordinating Council. Other members of the Regional Co-ordinating Council include the Regional Co-ordinating Director (Secretary), all the 18 District Chief Executives and Presiding members, as well as two representatives from the Ashanti Regional House of Chiefs. All Regional heads of department are ex-officio members of the Regional Co-ordinating Council.

The District/Metropolitan Assemblies are headed by Metropolitan/District Chief Executives. The District and Metropolitan Chief Executives are nominated by the President of the Republic and approved by two-thirds majority of the respective Metropolitan/District Assemblies. The Chief Executives, like the Regional Minister, are assisted by District Co-ordinating Directors. For effective administration, the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA) has been sub-divided into four sub-metros, namely Asokwa, Subin, Bantama and Manhyia. The following three additional districts have been created, to bring the total number in the region to twenty-one (21).

#### Cultural and social structure

The region has 36 Traditional Councils, each headed by a Paramount Chief. The Traditional Councils are the decentralised units of administration by traditional rulers and are used to mobilize the people at the local and community levels for development. The spiritual head of the region is the Asante King, the Oluṃfuo Asantehene.

All the Paramount Chiefs in the region are members of the Ashanti Regional House of Chiefs, with the Asantehene as the President of the house. The main language spoken in the region is Twi. Several festivals are celebrated in the region, the major ones being the Akwasidae and AɔaɛKese. These are religious festivals celebrated by some members of the Akan ethnic group of which the Ashantis belong.

The festivals are celebrated to remember past leaders and heroes. Though they are dead, their spirits are supposed to be alive and taking interest in the affairs of the living, watching their doings and consulting with them at Aɔaɛ.

#### Literacy of population

It reveals that 35.0 per cent of the population, 15 years and older in the region are not literate. A little under half (48.1%) are literate in both English and a Ghanaian language. Only 3.2 per cent are literate in a Ghanaian language only, while less than 1.0 per cent are able to read and write in other languages.

There are differences between the sexes in terms of literacy. More than half (55.8%) of the males are literate in English and a Ghanaian language compared with two fifth (40.4%) of the females. On the whole, the illiteracy level for the region (35.0%) is lower than that of the national average (42.1%).

#### Religion

The dominant religion in the region is Christianity (77.5%) followed by Islam (13.2%). The proportion of Christians is higher than the national average (68.8%), while that of Moslems is lower than the national average (15.9%). All other religious groups constitute insignificant proportions of the population. The proportion with no religion is however relatively high (7.3%).

#### Economic activity and employment

The economically active population in the region is engaged mainly in Agriculture (excluding Fishing), with 44.5 per cent of them employed in the branch of activity. This represents a decline from the 1984 level of 61.9 percent. The next highest proportion of the economically active population is employed in Wholesale and Retail Trade (18.4%), followed by Manufacturing (12.2%) and Community, Social and Personal Services etc., (9.9%). These four major economic activities employ a total of 85.0 per cent of the economically active population, which is lower than that of 1984 (94.4%).

The proportion of the economically active population engaged in other economic activities is less than 5.0 per cent in each case. Water and Transport, Storage and Communications, Electricity, Gas and all the other activities increased their proportions of the economically active population employed in 2000 compared with 1984, except Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry.

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